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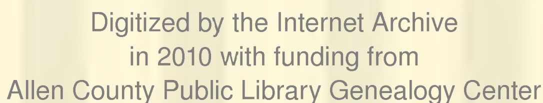
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Pennsylvania's Free School Laws of 1834

And Their Great Defender
THADDEUS STEVENS

Read Before the
Lebanon County Historical Society
June 27, 1917

By JOHN L. ROCKEY
Lebanon, Penna.

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Pennsylvania's Free School Laws of 1834 and Their Great Defender

THADDEUS STEVENS

By John L. Rockey

THADDEUS STEVENS, here called the Great Defender of the School Laws of 1834, was not a native of Pennsylvania. By adoption and service he became one of its most useful and distinguished citizens, as well as a national figure, reflecting great credit upon the State. But no matter how distinguished he might have been in forensic ability and statecraft, the chief purpose of this sketch is to show how persuasive and forceful he was in action at a most critical time, in preventing the repeal of untried school laws, which have placed our Commonwealth in line with other progressive States of the Union. That act alone should cause his memory to be cherished as one of Pennsylvania's greatest men.

Thaddeus Stevens was born at Danville, Calledonia county, Vermont, April 4, 1792. He was one of four sons, children of Sally and Joshua Stevens, who had removed to that locality, six years earlier, from Essex County, Massachusetts. The father added to his trade as shoemaker that of surveyor, and for that service received a tract of land in the new country, which had a cold and rigorous climate. Consequently most of the settlers remained poor, but they were very democratic in their feelings. There was no aristocracy of position or wealth, and the greatest equality of every nature prevailed, with much freedom of thought upon every subject. These surroundings were deeply impressed upon young Stevens, causing him to imbibe principles which he never forgot, and which were reflected in all his career.

Upon Sally Stevens, the mother, fell the lot of caring for her small and humble family. She was an unusually fine character, with noble aspirations, especially for her afflicted son Thaddeus, having an unshaken purpose to give him a good education which might aid to raise him above his lowly surroundings. The son greatly appreciated these efforts and sacrifices, having ever the warmest filial feelings for her, and, when success in life permitted him to do so, made generous provision for her comfort. But he could never sufficiently acknowledge his indebtedness to his mother. He said of her:

"I really think the greatest pleasure of my life resulted from my ability to give my mother a farm of two hundred and fifty acres, and a dairy of fourteen cows, and an occasional bright gold piece, which she loved to deposit in the contributor's box of the Baptist Church which she attended. This always gave her much pleasure and me much satisfaction. My mother was a very extraordinary woman. I have met very few women like her. My father was not a well-to-do man, and the support and education of the family depended upon my mother. She worked day and night to educate me. I was feeble and lame in youth, and as I could not work on the farm, she concluded to give me an education. I tried to repay her afterwards, but the debt of a child to his mother, you know, is one of the debts we can never pay." He greatly cherished her memory to the last, and by his will he established a fund, the income of which was forever to be used to plant each springtime "roses and other cheerful flowers" upon her grave.

Young Thaddeus diligently applied himself to his studies in the common schools, Peacham Academy and later in Dartmouth College, from which he graduated in the summer of 1814. He obtained a thorough education, the privileges for which he and his mother had striven, and now sought opportunity to make his way in life. That led him to York, Pennsylvania, in the fall of 1814, where for two years he was a teacher in an Academy conducted by a Dr. Perkins. At the same time he studied law in a local office, but when he applied for admission to practice in the courts of the county, he was refused because of a newly passed rule, that an applicant must devote

all of his time for two years to the study of law, to be eligible. Not discouraged, he went to Maryland, where he passed a successful examination in a higher court and was now ready to engage in professional work. Locating at Gettysburg, he was admitted to practice September 21, 1816. He encountered much discouragment and pronounced opposition, but after some years of poverty he achieved fame as a lawyer and success as a business man. With others he engaged in some ventures in Southern Pennsylvania which were successful but later left him burdened with a heavy debt, which for some time distressed him, but which in later years was conscientiously and very fully paid out of his professional earnings.

While living at Gettysburg he aided to found Pennsylvania College, in 1832, and was elected a trustee in 1834, giving it a bequest of a thousand dollars later. In this period he became interested in public matters and in 1833 was elected a member of the State Legislature from Adams county. He was re-elected in 1834 and this gave him opportunity to come to the defense of the new, and as yet untried, school law. His arguments against repeal attracted wide attention, because they were so wholly convincing. The unselfish defense given the case of free schools not only secured victory but caused the name of Stevens to be placed among the immortals of the country.

The full significance of his action, at this time, in securing such a reversal of opinion as was entertained by opponents, will become more apparent from a brief review of the history of education in the State of Pennsylvania up to that period. Especial heed must be given to the fact that much of the opposition came from the German element of population, which was a controlling factor in the Lebanon Valley and other sections. That opposition was in most cases based upon sincere religious conviction, which was not chargeable to hatred of schools or lack of desire for education. It was an opposition to methods proposed which were entirely contrary to German usages, which they dearly loved and which they were not yet ready to forsake.

"A strong opposition was developed in such religious denominations as the Friends, Mennonites, Lutherans and the Reformed, wherever those bodies were predominant. They, or at least a large part of the membership, maintained that the Church should not be disassociated from the means of education.[4] Their claim was that the young must be equally developed in mental and moral powers—the ability of the free school to do so was suspected, hence the lack of faith in that system."

More fully to understand the conditions prevailing in the Province, it is well to remember that in 1730 the German population numbered 30,000, or about one-third of all the inhabitants. In 1750 the proportion was the same—90,000, or one-third of the entire 270,000. So, again, the proportion remained in 1790, the 145,000 Germans being one-third of the whole population. Concerning these masses, in these different periods it has been said: "If they were deprived of an education, or if their education was neglected, it was for reasons other than from a desire to remain in ignorance."

For generations they had been impressed with the value of education. Upon this point Dr. Luther's teaching was very clear. He said: "Were I to leave my office as preacher I should choose to be a school master of boys," calling that a great and useful avocation. Also, he declared, "To make provision for the education of children is not only the duty of parents, but also of the State and the Church. How can reason and charity allow youth to grow up uneducated?" This education was to be both moral and mental. "The Heidelberg Catechism insisted upon the maintenance of the ministry of the Gospel in the schools of the land."

Under such teachings and influences the early German emigration to Pennsylvania could not have been grossly ignorant and may have been fairly well educated. They adhered, as much as possible, to the faith and customs of the old country. Usually, when they came in bodies of considerable size they brought along their pastor and the school master, and frequently such persons performed both functions, serving as minister and teacher. It has been claimed, and with show

of reason, that the real intelligence of those coming from Germany was as great as that of contemporary colonists or settlers from other parts of Europe. In some cases these original conditions may have been changed. Some colonists took up their abode in localities which were isolated, or at least so separate that community interests could not be well maintained. Under such conditions hardships must be endured and privations borne which would affect the training and education of the youth, and react upon the morals of the elders. In an account of life in certain German communities in 1734, conditions of that nature were called "deplorable." "Many lived without the services of competent preachers and teachers." In consequence "they wandered off from the life of the Church and strayed far in divers crooked ways."

Some of the stronger German settlements, impressed with these unsatisfactory affairs, now sought the services of men who were at least able to teach schools. Casper Leutbecker was thus secured for the Tulpehocken community in 1734. He began his work as teacher and lay preacher in the Reith (Reed) church, built some years earlier, and was probably the first teacher in the Lebanon Valley of whom there is authentic record. Conrad Weiser, who became a member of the community in 1729, was sometimes called the "School master of the Tulpehocken," but it is probable that his activity in public matters rather than actual school teaching secured that title for him. The quality of service given by Leutbecker was not attended with the best results, and their experiment was abandoned after some serious local troubles.

But a new era was soon to dawn. Protestant European countries began to realize that certain duties toward their countrymen in America should be assumed and be performed. They saw that pecuniary aid must be given and personal supervision at home be provided. The Lutherans of Germany were especially alert in taking up this work. They were fortunate in selecting as their Supervisor of these foreign missions Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg, a native of Hanover, but recently graduated from the University. He was scholarly and a linguist of unusual attainments, being able to speak the Ger-

man, Dutch, Swiss, French, English and the Swedish languages, which peculiarly fitted him for the work in Pennsylvania. Soon after his arrival in Philadelphia, in 1742, he took up his supervisory work among the Lutheran congregations of the Province, preaching and teaching wherever "The deplorable conditions" made most urgent appeal to him. An early visit to the Lebanon Valley led to warm acquaintance and friendly relations with Conrad Weiser, whose daughter, Maria, he married in 1743. This secured his friendly interest in our locality which was continued until his death, at Trappe in 1787. The effective service of Muhlenberg at a most critical time, both among churches and schools, resulted in placing them upon an enduring basis, very properly securing for him the title of "Father of Lutheranism in America."

Muhlenberg brought to the Reith, or Tulpehocken, congregation, about 1747, a young minister and teacher, named John Nicholas Kurtz, who was connected with church and school affairs in the Lebanon Valley until 1770, when he removed to York. He was among the very first in what is now Lebanon county to be recognized as a regular teacher, in Lutheran congregations.

The Calvinists of Holland and other countries of Europe, holding that faith, were equally fortunate in the choice of their general supervisor of churches and schools in America. They selected the Rev. Michael Schlatter, of Switzerland, for that work. He arrived in the Province in 1747 and was soon actively engaged. In a short time he reported that he had found about forty Reformed congregations but most of them were so poor that they were unable to support a school master. In consequence, "They were in danger of falling back in a new heathenism worse than the Indians."

These representations no doubt had something to do with the formation of the Charity Society of Holland, about 1751, which had liberal support, not only in that country but also in England. The royal family also gave support to the extent of several thousand crowns. In the year above given the Holland society voted to grant two thousand guilders per year, for a

period of five years, toward instructing Germans and their children in Pennsylvania. The plan received the sanction of the governor of the Province when he appointed Conrad Weiser and others of the State, to attend to the proper distribution of such funds. Near the same time (1754) the provincial authorities said that schools for Germans should be established, which removed possible opposition to schools contemplated or under the direction of the churches. A little earlier the Rev. Michael Schlatter had established Tulpehocken church, on the eastern line of the county, as it now exists, and a school was kept as part of its work. In 1755 while this was taught by one of the helpers of Schlatter, probably Boehm, application was made to the Society for aid to support the school. At the same time the congregation at Reading made a similar request.

The well-meant services of Schlatter, which lasted a few years longer, were not properly appreciated. The support given the Society in England was made the basis for a suspicion that the English had some sinister purposes in giving such generous aid, which would ultimately result in the displacement of German forms of worship and the substitution of the rites of the Church of England. Christopher Sauer's German paper, published at Germantown, was plainly outspoken against any means which would subordinate the religion and schools of the Germans, with their honored customs and associations. Much of Schlatter's influence was destroyed and for a time his good works were obscured if not wholly suspended. Nevertheless, the impetus given to many struggling congregations by him helped to place Reformed churches upon a better basis. New congregations were formed in our Lebanon territory, at Walmers and Kimmerling's which gave primary support to schools, as soon as it was possible to open them. Other Reformed and Lutheran churches, with schools connected, were formed in other parts of the country at a later day. All had their inception in the efforts of Muhlenberg and Schlatter, to have an enlightened membership, which would no longer exist without the benefit of schools, even of meager pretentions.

To some extent the Moravians had contemporary relationship with the foregoing religious bodies. In Lebanon county their first church was built at Hebron in 1750. The house was of stone, two stories high, to provide also living rooms for the minister and teacher, as well as a school room and place of worship. Here was the first school in the Lebanon city locality. But, as the Moravians were few in numbers and there was more or less denominational feeling against them as a sect, the school may not have been widely influential. Yet it was the second permanent school in our present county, Hill church having a better claim for priority.

In demonstration of the fact that the Germans of our part of the State were in favor of schools, and not opposed to education, under what they conceived to be proper restrictions, reference may here be made to the school at Ephrata. It was the first permanent one in this part of the State. That school was founded by Conrad Beissel and his followers, about 1733. After six years it had a separate building for its own use in which Ludwig Hoecker was the learned teacher. Brethren and sisters of the community gave varying assistance, as the needs of the school demanded. For forty years he gave reputation to the school which had fine local patronage and attendance from points as distant as Baltimore.

The Revolution affected all the schools of this part of the State, many of their buildings being devoted to the uses of the war. The house at Hebron was so used, and the school house at Ephrata became a hospital for the care of the sick and wounded from the battlefield at Brandywine. It is claimed for Ludwig Hoecker that he also opened the first Sunday school in the world at Ephrata, in 1740, or forty years earlier than that of Gloucester, England, by Robert Raikes, who is generally called the "Father of Sunday Schools." This school at Ephrata was for instruction in the Bible, singing and general spiritual culture, not differing much from the Sabbath schools of our times.

The Revolution caused many adjustments of previous conditions: It, also, brought obligations from which there could be no escape nor continued postponement. The education of

the masses became an imperative demand. No republic could prosper or long endure if those who must shape its affairs were unfitted to do so. If a few only had the proper knowledge to administer state affairs democracy would soon be subordinated and autocratic rule would again prevail. The logic was irresistible. Education must be general and for making it so schools must be established and be supported by the State. This view had been taken by Benjamin Franklin as early as 1749, who formulated a plan for a system of schools which would embrace a curriculum of six classes, all of which would have full benefit of instruction. The entire Province should share all these benefits without reference to church connection or affiliation.

In 1786 Dr. Benjamin Rush, another of Pennsylvania's signers of the Declaration of Independence, addressing the Provincial Assembly, submitted a "Plan for Establishing Public Schools in Pennsylvania." By the terms of the plan these schools would become the source of support or patronage of higher institutions of learning, thus forming a comprehensive system, which would be very useful to the State.

In advocating the need for the general education of the masses, in a Republic, Dr. Rush said: "I conceive the education of our youth to be peculiarly necessary in Pennsylvania since our citizens are composed of the natives of many different countries of Europe. Our public schools would, by producing one general and uniform system of education, render the mass of people more homogeneous and thereby fit them more easily for uniform and peaceful government."

Further, he said, "The only foundation for a useful education in a Republic must be laid in religion. Without this there can be no virtue, and without virtue there can be no liberty, and liberty is the object and life of all republican governments." "Let no pupil be taught that he does not belong to himself, but that he is public property. Let him be taught to love his family but, at the same time, that he must forsake and forget them when the welfare of his country requires it."

The purpose, on the part of the framers of our state government, to provide the means to secure an education for all the

youth of the Commonwealth, very properly found expression in the first constitutional convention. In that instrument, adopted in 1790, were written these clauses:

"Section I. The Legislature shall, as soon as may conveniently be, provide by law for the establishment of schools, throughout the State, in such a manner that the poor may be taught gratis."

"Section II. The Arts and Sciences shall be promoted in one or more Seminaries of learning."

As the masses of the people of the State had common toil, common privations, common dangers, and many common interests, it would seem that the way to the establishment of common schools should be accomplished readily, and especially so because there were already, in use, in almost every part of the State, thousands of buildings, many of them erected by common effort, to house Pay Schools, or those maintained privately. The idea already existed that some kind of schools must be maintained. The question to be determined was, should they be free to all?

The movement to establish free schools had made favorable progress in other States of the Union. In Connecticut a system became operative as early as 1770, which provided instruction for every child of the State. New York's system was adopted in 1789. That of Ohio came later. Opportunity there was to see such laws in actual operation and to adopt laws which should be comparatively free of objectional features.

But for more than ten years after the constitution was adopted there was no legislation to create real free schools.

A law enacted in 1802 aimed to provide instruction for poor children. But as it was found to be ineffective it was displaced by a new act in 1804. That, too, was not satisfactory and it gave way to the rather noted act of 1809, which aimed "to teach the children of the poor gratis." It was in effect a pauper school law. Then came repeals and re-enactments in 1824, and repeal in 1826—there being somewhat of a purpose to obey the mandate of the constitution and at the same time attempting to minimize the actual purposes of a free school law. A year later in 1827, a society was formed in Philadel-

phia to create public sentiment in favor of free schools, but the general appeal was unsuccessful. There was decided opposition to such a movement, especially in the southeastern part of the State. There was not actual opposition to education, but a strong contention was raised that each locality should itself regulate such matters. That view had prevailed in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Lancaster, where special school districts had been created which provided free school privileges for the youth of those sections; and in 1830 Carlisle provided a free school for its negro children, the first in the United States.

Another Act was passed in 1831 which was an advance in effective school legislation, because there was actual provision made for the accumulation of a fund for the support of a common school system. Such a fund was to amount to at least $2,000,000 in ten years. Compared with the generous support now given free schools that was a ridiculously small sum, but it served as a proper forerunner of the law of 1834.

In December, 1831, Gov. George Wolf made a forceful plea for a system of common free schools, and his next message, to the Legislature of 1833-34, was devoted almost entirely to a plea for a general system of schools, which would benefit all classes of the State.* This matter had now become a most important issue and much discussion was provoked in various parts of the Commonwealth. After the General Assembly had been well convened and preliminary movements had been made by that body, Senator Samuel Breck of Philadelphia, a native of Massachusetts, who was a man of scholarly attainments, public spirited and of fine social reputation, introduced a bill which became the famous school law of 1834.

*Bearing on Gov. Wolf's part in securing a system of common schools in Pennsylvania this amusing story is told by James Rosbrough, who, with others, was interested in the erection of an Academy at Bath, Northampton County, in the year 1826, means for the same to be secured by subscription. Amongst others in the neighborhood called upon to subscribe was a German, George Wolf, who, however, refused to subscribe by saying: "Dis etication und dings, make raskels." As a further argument towards securing his aid Wolf was told that his sons, George and Philip, would have the advantage of an education, and that his favorite son, George, might become Governor sooner or later, to which he replied: "Vell, ven den my George is Gofeernor, he will be kweer dimes." Wolf subscribed nevertheless, and as a matter of fact, his son, George, got his English education in that Academy, and as a further matter of fact did become Governor of Pennsylvania, and had the proud honor of signing the Act of Assembly establishing a common school system in the State.

It passed the lower House February 27, 1834, with but one dissenting vote that of Assemblyman Grim. On the fifteenth of the following month, the bill passed the Senate, three members opposing: McCullough of Huntingdon, Sangston of Fayette and Stoever of Dauphin. This almost unanimous approval caused Governor Wolf to sign the bill April 1, 1834. He commended it warmly, saying: "The act should be sustained on the ground that the children of the State belonged to the Commonwealth; that they would make or influence its future; hence all, rich and poor alike, should have the privilege of schools without distinction." The law was to become effective on the third Friday of September, 1834, when school directors were to be elected in each of the 937 districts of the State, to be followed by a levy of taxes in November for the support of the free schools. More than half of the districts of the State, 485 in all, either voted against the system or openly and stubbornly defied the provisions of the law. In many localities there was most violent manifestation of opposition to the free school law and the discussions which followed, pro and con, everywhere, by political parties, churches and even families, caused divisions which made new alignments necessary. Bitter enmities were made which were of long duration, and, in some instances, the business of tradesmen was ruined because they had espoused the cause of free schools. At the next general election the Democratic Governor Wolf, seeking re-election, went down in defeat, but fortunately his Whig successor, Joseph Ritner, disappointed those who had hoped that he would lead the forces against the proposed free schools. A number of legislators, members of the former Assembly, failed of re-election, when they would not declare themselves for repeal, and political oblivion threatened those favoring the law. The new Legislature elected was pledged to work for the repeal of the law and of the fifty-one counties, at that time in the State, thirty-eight petitioned for the repeal of the Act of 1834, eleven submitted no petitions at all, and two asked for modification of the law. The sentiment of the State at large was illustrated by the volume of petitions submitted. But 2500 citizens remonstrated against the repeal of the law,

while those praying for such action numbered 32,000. In Adams county, represented by Stevens, three-fourths of the voters wanted the law repealed and he himself was re-elected to the Assembly of 1835 to oppose the provisions of the law or to work for its repeal. An estimate of the strength of the repealers clearly presaged the death of the law and the friends of free schools were in doubt and gloom.

When the new Assembly was convened in December, 1834, the battle was resumed with unabated vigor and substitutes or amendatory laws were proposed. One of these had as its title "To educate the Children of the Rich at Moderate Prices and the Poor Gratis." The discussion of the merits of the various measures was continued with increased vigor until the time agreed upon for final action, April 10 and April 11, 1835. On the former day the Senate passed a substitute bill, which practically repealed all the good points of the law. Only eight Senators went on record to retain the law of 1834, and of those voting to repeal it thirteen had helped to *enact* it a few months before and would now not even give it a trial. The day set for final disposition, April 11, 1835, dawned balmy and spring-like, nature being calm and peaceful. But it was very evident that the feelings of the Legislators were most tense and highly pitched. The repeal of the law, judging from every indication, was a foregone conclusion. Scarcely a ray of hope remained to cheer the friends of free schools and those favoring it were regarded as enemies of the State. The Chaplain appeared to sense the situation when he arose and solemnly besought Almighty God "to bare His strong right arm and save the State from that poverty and bankruptcy which were sure to follow if the people were to have their property wrested from them for the education of all the children."

After every leader had used his most weighty arguments or made his strongest appeals for or against the law, it fell to the lot of Thaddeus Stevens to make the closing address, and all eyes were centered on him. At this time he was in the prime of his life, being forty-three years old, and no longer gave evidence of the infirmities of his youth. His slenderness was gone, his figure was well-rounded out, giving him a com-

manding appearance, which some called majestic. One who was present on that memorable occasion, and who had noticed Stevens particularly, said: "He appeared like a descended god." His refined countenance, noble voice and full tone, uttering the strongest convictions of an earnest mind and honest heart fairly electrified those who saw him and listened to him on that momentous occasion. His address was so logical, so full of conviction and so manifestly unselfish and sincere, that all opposition to the law was subdued, so that this one speech saved the system for the State. The House voted not to repeal the law, two-thirds of the members favoring the Stevens' amendment. This conversion of sentiment also extended to the Senate, which recalled its action of the previous day and now concurred with the action of the House. The situation was unmatched in the history of legislative proceedings. The conditions were peculiarly strong and definite. A majority of the members of this legislature had been elected with the explicit understanding that they would seek the repeal of the law of 1834, and until Stevens had made his persuasive speech there was no doubt of their willingness and ability to carry out their instructions. But this speech was so impassioned, yet withal so sincere and logical, that all the barriers of prejudice were broken down and former enemies became his friends in the support of a measure which to him was a holy object and which was the germ of a system which has become the pride and boast of our Commonwealth, and terms of which are among the most liberal of the entire civilized world.

In all particulars have been realized the results which had been predicted, if the law were put in operation; and although these laws have since been greatly amplified and the scope vastly extended, the State has *never* been on the verge of bankruptcy in consequence of its free schools. Of the service rendered by Thaddeus Stevens on that occasion, the noted Henry Ward Beecher said it entitled him to be called "The Father of the Common Schools of Pennsylvania." "No inscription on his gravestone could be better selected than that title. From his grave no purer light could stream, so far as humanity is concerned, than such inscription, to show the

founding of a system of common schools which has disenthralled Pennsylvania from its ignorance and is bringing it by knowledge, to the stature and power of a gigantic commonwealth."

The speech of Thaddeus Stevens was most remarkable at the time it was made for its forensic greatness. The lapse of years had given it additional brightness until it has been recognized as a classic of its kind—a matchless plea for universal education. The arguments he used and the chaste language employed merit a careful study, but space allotted will permit reference to a few high points only. Concerning the effort to annul the law of 1834, he said:

"The repealing act is, in my opinion, of a most hateful and degrading character. It is a re-enactment of the pauper law of 1809. It proposed that the assessors shall take a census and make a record of the poor. This shall be revised and a new record be made by the County Commissioners, so that the names of those who have the misfortune to be poor men's children shall be forever preserved as a distinct class in the archives of the county. The teacher, too, is to keep in his school a pauper book and register the names and attendance of the poor, thus pointing out and recording their poverty in the midst of their companions. Sir, hereditary distinctions of rank are sufficiently odious, but that distinction which is founded on poverty is infinitely more so. Such a law should be entitled, 'An act for branding and marking the poor, so that they may be known from the rich and the proud.'"

Equally forceful was his demonstration that the law had been enacted wisely and that it was salutary, useful and important in its effect upon the people of the State. He said: "It would be humiliating to enter into a formal argument to prove the utility and, to a free government, the absolute necessity of general education. More than two thousand years ago the deity who presided over intellectual endowments ranked highest for dignity, chastity and virtue among the goddesses worshipped by cultivated pagans. And I shall not insult this House or our constituents by supposing any course of reasoning necessary to convince them of its high importance. Such

necessity would be degrading to a Christian age and a free republic. If education be of admitted importance to the people, under all forms of government, and of unquestioned *necessity* when they govern themselves, it follows, of course, that its cultivation and diffusion is a matter of *public* concern and a duty which every government owes to its people. In accordance with this principle, the ancient republics which were the most renowned for their wisdom and success, considered every child born subject to their control, as the property of the State, so far as its education was concerned; and during the proper period of instruction they were withdrawn from the control of their parents and placed under the guardianship of the Commonwealth. There all were instructed at the same schools; all were placed on perfect equality, the rich and the poor men's sons, for all were deemed to be children of the same common parent—of the Commonwealth."

"If an elastic republic is to endure for any length of time, every elector must have sufficient information, not only to accumulate wealth and to take care of his pecuniary concerns, but to direct wisely matters of legislation and other affairs for the benefit of the nation. For some part of all these things, some agency in approving or disapproving of these public affairs falls to every freeman. If, then, the permanency of our government depends on such knowledge, it is the *duty* of government to see that the means of information be diffused to every citizen. This is sufficient answer to those who deem education a private and not a public duty—who argue that they are willing to educate their own children, but not their neighbor's children."

"I know how large a portion of the community can scarcely feel sympathy with or understand the necessities of the poor; or appreciate the exquisite feelings which they enjoy when they receive the boon of education which would give them intellectual power to raise themselves above the clogs which hereditary poverty had cast upon them. It is not surprising that he whose fat acres have descended from father to son, in unbroken succession, should never have sought for the surest means of alleviating poverty. Sir, when I reflect how apt

hereditary wealth, hereditary influence and perhaps, as a consequence, hereditary pride are to close the avenues and to steel the heart against the wants and the rights of the poor, I am induced to thank my Creator for having, from early life, bestowed upon me the blessing of poverty. Sir, it *is* a blessing—for if there be any human feeling more ethereal and divine than all others, it is that which deeply sympathizes with misfortune." "Nor should the children of profligates be deprived of the benefits which might be given to the thrifty and the industrious. It would not be right to punish innocent children for the shortcomings of erring parents. To do so you would virtually establish classes and grades, founded on no merit of that particular generation, but on the *demerits* of their ancestors; an aristocracy of the most odius and insolent kind—the aristocracy of wealth and pride."

And finally, in closing his speech, to show his absolute unselfishness in this matter, he said: "I am comparatively a stranger among you, born in another, in a distant State; no parent or kindred of mine did, does or probably will ever dwell within your borders. I have none of those strong cords to bind me to your honor and your interest; yet if there is any one thing on earth which I ardently desire above all others it is to see Pennsylvania standing up in her intellectual, as she confessedly does in her physical resources, high above all confederate rivals. How shameful, then, would it be for you, her native sons, to feel less concern for the welfare of our Commonwealth and not secure for yourselves the respect and reverence of your posterity."

The great speech of Thaddeus Stevens was printed on silk by some of his admirers, in Reading, and was presented to him in appreciation of his efforts in behalf of general education. Through subsequent years much commendation was given. A letter written to Thaddeus Stevens in 1864, by a lady of the State, had a reply containing these noble sentiments:

"Although Pennsylvania started late, I believe a quarter of a century more will see her children as universally and as well educated as those of any State of the Union. As the mother of eight children you thank me for my efforts in behalf

of the free school system. Such thanks, while I am living and if I could hope for the blessings of the poor when I am no more, are a much more grateful reward than silver or gold."

The forceful speech of Thaddeus Stevens clearly saved the Brecht law of 1834, but it did not entirely convince every element of the State as being the best measure for the public good, and opposition continued. This was manifested by a large church element which wanted parochial schools, and Germans especially jealously viewed the encroachment upon what they considered the permanent place of their mother tongue. They dared not risk its effacement, as they apprehended might be the case, in the course of time, if English schools were established and maintained by law. These were aided by a number of old and aristocratic families who were holding old-world ideas of rank and privilege and who were not in sympathy with the doctrines of equality upon which the school law was based. "They held tenaciously to the old European idea that there must be several classes at least—a higher and a lower—those ruled and the rulers, and that the former class need not have an education equal to the latter class. In fact, they claimed they were not entitled to equal privileges of education. The poor and lowly needed a limited education only."

These conscientious objectors were unwittingly and quite effectually aided by an unrelenting opposition, manifested by many ignorant and penurious persons, found in almost every locality. Their conduct was prompted by selfish motives, which caused them to be pre-determined not to be influenced by any appeal to their judgment, reason or patriotism. They were thus, as a class, utterly beyond any convictions, which might mitigate their opposition which remained entirely hostile and so resourceful as to be very annoying.

All these elements had influence in Lebanon county, those having real conscientious objections being most numerous. After the law was passed the representative in the Legislature, Mr. Krause, plead for the exemption of this county from the operation of the law, in which movement he was joined by the representative of Montgomery county. But their plea was

unavailing. Since all of the nine districts of Lebanon county had voted to reject the provisions of the law of 1834 there was now delay and hesitancy in levying the taxes for the support of free schools. In five of the nine districts such action was delayed for ten years. As late as 1845 the townships of Annville, Bethel, Jackson, North Lebanon and South Lebanon had not yet fully complied with the law.

It was claimed by those showing intense opposition to the law of 1834 that the measure was too compulsory—that schools established under its provisions would be, in their nature, "Zwing Schulen," or forced schools, instead of being free schools, and, therefore, would be more harmful than useful. In fact, it was claimed by some that the proposed system would demoralize social and business conditions. As expressed by one: "Free schools are the hot beds wherein idle drones, too lazy for honest labor, are reared and maintained. The free school was originated and is supported by its partisans for the purpose of making places for men too lazy to work, and the school tax is a thinly disguised tribute which the honest, hard-working farmer and mechanic must pay out of their hard earnings to pauper, idle and lazy schoolmasters." These matters were so bitterly discussed that ruptures were caused in church, social and even in business relations, to the extent of interference with long established trade conditions and community practices.*

Nevertheless, the public school system had encouraging growth. In February, 1837, the Secretary of State, who was

*Another view, and one altogether fairer and truer to the Pennsylvania Germans, as a class, in their opposition to the proposed common school system, was, as they held it, that such a system tended to withdraw education from the control of the parents and the clergy. In a letter, written January 26, 1836, to the working men of Philadelphia, the Hon. H. A. Muhlenberg says: "The Germans of our State are not opposed to education as such, but only to any system that to them seems to trench on their parental and national rights." "They still retained the German theory of education, that the child belongs first to God, then to the parents, then to the State, the chief responsibility for their education resting on the church and parents. Their educational system was pre-eminently a religious one, which looked not only at the intellect but the soul, and had in mind not only the preparation for the life that now is, but for the life to come. An additional reason, of course, was their attachment to their dialect, a subject which at the time was playing so important a role in church affairs."

"From the vantage-ground of the present day we believe them to have been wrong in opposing the common school system, and they recognize it now, but it was not ignorance nor any unworthy motive which led to their opposition. Nor must it be forgotten that it was a German Governor, George Wolf, who finally succeeded in effecting the adoption of the new system." Prof. Oscar Kuhno in his "The German and Swiss Settlements of Colonial Pennsylvania."

also the School Superintendent, reported that the schools in operation numbered 3,584, or an increase, since the operation of the law, of 2,586. The pupils enrolled numbered 150,838, or an increase of 118,294. Male teachers received an average salary of $18.38 per month; while the salary of female teachers was $11.96 per month. The length of the year's school term was four months and three days.

After half a dozen years progress school interest was halted or, for a time, remained almost stationary. Of the districts in the State, about one thousand in all, there were still two hundred non-accepting districts in the State; that is, there were that number of districts which declined to levy taxes for the support of free schools, in order to secure the 25 per cent rebate offered by the county for full compliance with the terms of the law, providing for such privilege. The five Lebanon county districts were included in this list of non-acceptors.

As is usually the case where there is no alternative, and after passions have subsided, better counsels prevailed. Lebanon county gradually took its proper place. The schools established were developed through years of toil and effort until they met all requirements of the laws. The rank attained has never been lost, but there is a constant desire for greater excellence. It should be remembered that in several of the dilatory townships there was always great desire for education. Private academies were early established and the means for higher learning have always been at hand. In two townships, Annville and Jackson, there was development which resulted in the founding of colleges which enjoy more than State reputation. And the great defender of the law of 1834 has not been forgotten. His name has been effectually perpetuated by the Stevens School building, of the City of Lebanon.

In 1836 Thaddeus Stevens was one of the framers of the State Constitution, and there his love for the equality of man and universal education was fully manifested. He now left public life and bent his energies to the restoration of his distressed fortunes. He was impoverished with a debt of $217,-000, in consequence of mismanagement of business by asso-

ciates. Seeking a greater field for the practice of his profession, he removed to Lancaster, in the summer of 1842, and so successful was he that after six years he had reduced his debts to $30,000. His practice of law extended to the Supreme Courts of the State in which he plead one hundred and twenty-five cases, in the course of twenty years. His success as a lawyer was unquestioned and in 1848 he was sent to Congress from the Lancaster district. There he continued two terms, becoming recognized as a fearless leader of the anti-slavery cause. Said Howell Cobb, a noted Southerner, of him:

"Our enemy has a general now. This man is rich, therefore, we cannot buy him. He does not want higher office, therefore we cannot allure him. He is not vicious, therefore, we cannot seduce him. He is in earnest. He means what he says. He is bold. He cannot be flattered nor frightened."

Upon every vital question of those times Stevens stood unflinchingly for his convictions and never once abated his hatred of human slavery and injustice to man. A retirement from Congress for six years, and greater fame and success as a lawyer, was followed by another entrance into Congress, where he remained until his death, being at all times a most dominant figure, as the leader of the Republican forces.

A Congressional colleague* said of him, "He had invincible courage, resolute adherence to principles and purposes, which gave him unparalleled leadership." James G. Blaine rated him as "one of the three greatest American parliamentarians, viz: Henry Clay, Stephen A. Douglas and Thaddeus Stevens."

His position in Congress brought him into conflict of opinion with President Andrew Johnson upon the question of reconstruction of the Southern states. Neither modified his views; both held them tenaciously. The contention culminated in articles of impeachment against the President February 20, 1868. Stevens was selected as a member of the trial board, but on account of ill health could take no active part. His tireless energy no longer sustained him; his strength at the age of seventy-six years had been so much wasted that he died at Washington, August 11, 1868, greatly mourned by those who

*Congressman Dawes.

knew his true worth. Unostentatiously he was buried in his adopted city, Lancaster, which he greatly loved. City, State and Country united to pay him loving tribute, for a great man had gone hence.

In death as in life Thaddeus Stevens was a true commoner. Always deprecating class distinctions of every nature, and disdaining to profit through the circumstances of wealth, he selected Shreiner's Cemetery as a lowly place for his last repose, for reasons as expressed by the epitaph on his tombstone, written by himself:

"I repose in this quiet and secluded spot, not for any preference for solitude, but finding other cemeteries limited by charter rules as to race, I have chosen it that I might be enabled to illustrate in my death the principles which I have advocated through a long life—the equality of man before his Creator."

These graven sentiments show what characteristics gave him true distinction. In every sense he was truly democratic. "Equality was his animating principle. No man could be so poor or so friendless that he might not have the full protection of the laws for the benefit of all mankind; nor any so powerful as to rise above their sway."

The asperities aroused by political strife, which inflamed the passions of men, long obscured the true worth of Thaddeus Stevens. His radical views only were remembered. But time has mollified much of this acrimony and we can now estimate his character as a citizen, patriot and statesman. In every sphere he can be accorded praise which will exalt him as the years go by, especially designating him as a strong national figure when the Union was in the throes of dissolution. But as an adopted son of Pennsylvania and his unselfish devotion to all her best interests, his memory will remain most prominent. No stronger proof is needed than the splendid school system which has been evolved from his endeavors and his defense of the law of 1834. His zeal, ardor and successful plea for free schools and universal education are undoubtedly the glory of a brilliant crown to his memory. Through all ages these acts will shine brilliantly, causing imperishable remembrance and undying fame.

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